

Alden Library Renovation on Track

By Lesley Mahoney

From the outside, what will soon be the new town library looks a lot like the Upper Alden School built in the mid-1920s.

That is precisely the point.

While the new library under construction will be on the cutting edge of the approaching 21st century, it will respect a rich history spanning more than 70 years in which thousands of children passed through its halls.

"The town made an evaluation in renovating the building to keep it much like the atmosphere of an American public building from the mid-20th century — so the building wouldn't try to be anything it wasn't," said Deborah Bornheimer, the project manager for the library.

She said her love for libraries is what got her involved in the project.

"I think they're places where people of all ages can go and be invisible — a place to be with other people or be alone," she said, adding the new library

will offer a more accommodating meeting spot than the present library for a town with a growing population with increasing needs.

"We don't have a center of town in Duxbury," she said. "It's an isolated place to be."

Under construction since September after J. Slotnik Company of Newton was awarded a \$4.6 million contract to convert the Upper Alden School into a new town library, the building is slated for Sept. 25 completion.

"Basically, they gutted the building right to its skin," Bornheimer said.

Needless to say, the April Fool's Blizzard caused some trepidation. At that time, workers were in the process of replacing the old diaphragm with steel beams dropped through square holes that were cut in the roof.

"This building was held together by Kleenex," Bornheimer said.

With its new diaphragm in place, she said the building is built to last.

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years," Bornheimer said, offering the remarks of a steel erector — "this building has more steel than the Columbus Avenue overpass on the Southeast Expressway."

Since then, the structural or "meat and potatoes" work has been finished and the workers under the direction of project supervisor John Bidgood are

shoring up the interior finishes and utility installation.

Last year, town meeting voters appropriated \$3 million for the project and the town received \$2.1 million in state grants and \$200,000 in federal grants.

In addition, the ongoing capital campaign for the library reached its \$1 million goal in 1996 and has since garnered \$200,000 more. The funds have been raised to purchase all furnishings, computers and interior items for the library.

The new library will be 40,000 square feet — more than three times the size of the present library — and boast two floors of open space and a lower level concourse with meeting rooms, gallery space and a café. Future uses for the existing library have not yet been determined.

On a tour of the building last week, Bornheimer painted a visual picture of the books, offices and reading tables

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that will soon take the place of the first floor's bare steel and copper.

On the first floor from the "campus" entrance," Bornheimer said patrons will be greeted on the right by a sofa bench and telephones "so all the little kids waiting for mom can call home and sit here out of the rain."

The main entrance will face away from the school complex and be accessible by pavilion steps or an elevator.

Bornheimer followed the blue print guide, pointing out the spaces where study carols, reading nooks, reading tables, book stacks, and meeting rooms will go — rendering a blend of quiet and communal space.

The second floor — which will house the library director's office, study rooms, the board of trustees room named for the late trustee Thomas Lanman, and "history room — looks more finished, with its white walls and floor.

The second floor will also hold a homework center — the Kispert Center, named for the late well-known teacher David Kispert.

Arched windows line the building, offering a glorious view from every angle. Bornheimer said one can even see Duxbury Beach from the cupola — for which a gold leaf ball donation among other specialty items is being sought.

While all of furniture and necessities are funded by the capital campaign, the library's wish list includes things like handicapped accessible computers and additions to the children's collection.

While interior designer Jane Lucas of the Boston firm Lucas Stefura Interiors is working with the architect team on plans for the library's interior, Bornheimer offered her perspective on what the library should look like.

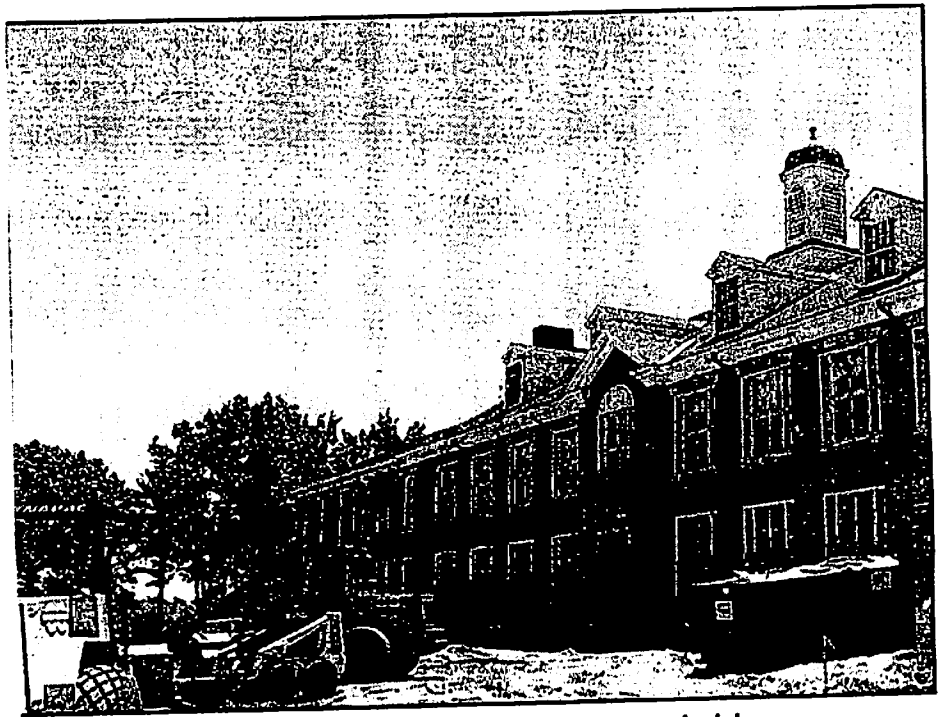
"I said my perspective is that I want the inside of the building to have such a subdued look — like the beach at twilight when all the colors perfectly fading into each other — so nothing is ostentatious and overwhelming," Bornheimer said.

That way, she said people can use and enjoy the library "without being overwhelmed."

Consequently, she said the design plans "meet that test."

And Bornheimer said she is confident an October move to the new library will take place — a welcome move for all involved.

Library Director Joanne Lamothe, who is working with the library staff to secure the interior furnishings and computers, said she is thrilled and looking forward to the move.



Construction of the new town library is on schedule.

Staff Photo by Chris Bernstein

Since the mid-1980s, the board of library trustees encountered problem after problem — from cramped space due to a growing population to issues with computer networking.

"Solving one problem only opened us up to six bigger problems," said Bornheimer, who was a library trustee at the time.

She said it became apparent that the library needed more than piecemeal solutions to its problems.

To address the capitulating problems, Town Moderator Allen Bornheimer appointed a long-range planning committee in 1988 to study to the library.

Serving as chairman, Deborah Bornheimer said the main objective of the committee was to keep the library on the "school campus" — either side of a portion of St. George Street is home to the elementary and high schools, athletic fields, library and the Percy Walker Pool.

Because it was obvious that some kind of expansion was at hand, three different plans to expand the existing library were devised.

But when the school committee suddenly closed the Upper Alden building, the committee switched gears and started to look at that building as a solution to its problems.

Bornheimer, however, said ini-

tially she was not thrilled at that idea because so much time and strategy had been expended to adapt the present library.

"They had to drag me kicking and screaming (to look at the building)," she said.

When Bornheimer finally went

to look at Upper Alden, she agreed the Upper Alden presented "a much better location." She said in the long run, it would be an asset to save and keep the Upper Alden building, adding that the general contractor had said "this building was built when

buildings were buildings."

From there on in, the project went full speed ahead.

"We went to the wall," Bornheimer said, explaining the town's efforts to get the best possible contractor.

Bornheimer was referring to the controversy that surfaced when the town awarded the contract to Slotnik, the second lowest bidder. While state law requires that the contract be awarded to the lowest bidder, the attorney general's office supported the town's decision to select Slotnik, denying the protest of the lowest bidder, Seaver Construction Co. of Woburn, which failed to address two addenda to the project specification.

She said that perseverance paid off, and then some. Not only did the attorney general's office support the town's decision, but Bornheimer had nothing but good words to say for Slotnik.

"They're delivering," she said.